DRAFT Compatible Contemporary Design Standards

Intent Statement

The intent of these standards is to provide a means to objectively assess the compatibility of proposed contemporary design with the buildings that establish the existing character of the historic district. The historic district is a resource that conveys a particular place and time of the past and its designation indicates that it is more important than any of its individual components, including new construction. A new building should be neutral in visual effect rather than call undue attention to itself through non-conformity in the streetscape.

The City's homogeneous residential neighborhoods need infill buildings that are comparable in materials, form and design elements, as well as scale. A proposed contemporary design must pass a "visual compatibility" test that is derived from several factors of design, with the use of materials, design articulation, and color as important factors. Compatibility is a visual assessment that should not need to be explained.

Compatible contemporary design avoids replication of traditional building types and styles yet sustains a sense of continuity in architectural language and the use of materials. This is achieved by adding or reinterpreting building elements of existing historic buildings to some extent. The design of a new building shall maintain a balance between a differentiation from historic buildings and compatibility with them and both of these characteristics must be readily perceivable. This approach to the design of new buildings respects the existing context and uses its underlying principles of space, composition, scale of parts to the whole, ratio of solids and voids, and extent of ornament. Materials shall convey their inherent qualities and shall not imitate other materials.

New construction shall reflect the historic district's urban sense of place and shall not create conspicuous disparity due to:

- the size, height, scale or repetition of units;
- a juxtaposition that exaggerates differences between the old and new buildings;
- the diminishment of existing historic resources through the scale or site arrangement of new buildings;
- an effect upon the streetscape that reduces its sense of harmony and the character of the historic district as a composition of historic and newer buildings; or
- other visual factors.

A new building that makes no obvious attempt with visual design elements to be contextual in materials, design articulation, color, scale, and placement shall not be determined to be compatible contemporary construction.

The color of exterior building materials can easily establish compatibility or have the opposite effect. When a brick shade dominates in the blockfront context, the use of a similarly colored brick for the dominant building material is an obvious way to achieve visual compatibility in both material and color. However, material color can also achieve compatibility and some brick may not be compatible; the color and texture of the chosen material matter as well.

The design standards herein provide specific objective direction based on this intent and address issues considered to be critical to achieving design compatibility. The term “shall” indicates compliance is required unless an acceptable alternative can be achieved in a particular circumstance or unless site specific factors, such as the absence of a contextual dominant color, material or height, indicates that the intent can be achieved without full compliance to a standard.

STANDARDS

General

A new building shall have an appearance that represents the proposed use. For instance, a residential building shall have the overall presence of a residential building.

New buildings shall be compatible with the size, scale, color, materials and character of the district, sub-area or block.

Height

New buildings shall be generally consistent with the existing heights of buildings in the immediate block, the district, or a sub-area of the district, which provide the appropriate visual context(s). Absolute alignment with the rooflines or cornice lines of adjacent buildings is not essential. A new two-story building shall have eaves at the height of historic two-story buildings on the block. A one-story difference in height is generally considered to be compatible when both buildings are over one-story in height. In contrast, a one-story building often appears incompatible in a streetscape lined with multi-story buildings.

Massing

The massing of the building shall be readily perceived to be comparable to that of buildings in the historic district. This relationship shall be based on massing utilizing a rectangular footprint and similar ratios of width to height of existing buildings.

Curved and angular forms may be used on small portions of buildings that have other massing compatible with the buildings of the district.

Distinctly atypical or excessively varied massing for the sake of variety is not considered to support the desired comparability of massing.

The roof shape shall have one dominant form and/or pitch, and shall not be the visually dominant feature of a building when seen from the street.

Setback and Blockface

The blockface maintained by the setback of buildings shall not be diluted by the placement of a new building. If there is a consistent setback, the primary mass of a new building shall be at the same setback line.

A single infill building that is flanked by historic ones shall maintain the setback line of one or both of those buildings. If the setback line is not consistent, the placement of the building shall be perceived as compatible.

A single infill building shall be positioned to maintain the common distance between houses on the blockfront on one side if a wider lot is being built on.

A limited number of buildings may be placed to create spaces identified to be of value to the neighborhood, such as community gardens or courtyards. This placement shall be at the rear of the property, adjacent to the alley.

Site plans that introduce suburban forms of development, including but not limited to new streets forming cul-de-sacs with buildings facing them or individual driveways leading to front garages, shall not be introduced into the district.

Street-facing Façade Composition

A street-facing façade shall have a vertical orientation and/or prominent vertical elements, no matter the height of the building.

A street façade shall incorporate architectural elements that have a human scale and reflect interior and exterior patterns of use or ownership.

The design of a street façade shall use window and door placement, as well as vertical plane breaks, to avoid large expanses of solid walls.

A street façade shall have a ratio of solids to voids – walls to windows – that is comparable to nearby buildings or those of the same type in the district.

A street façade shall not include garage doors.

Materials on Visible Façades

The dominant façade material shall be comparable in material or color to the prominent visual character of its blockfront setting.

A street façade shall have one primary material that comprises at least 80 percent of the façade, a material that is authentic and does not imitate others.

When a building is sited so that one or more side-facing façades is highly visible due to a street-corner location or a side yard wider than 25 feet, the primary street façade material shall be dominant on the highly visible side façades by comprising at least 50 percent of the wall surface.

Secondary materials on the street façade may introduce materials not used in the historic district buildings.

Primary and secondary façade materials shall be combined with constructional logic, which includes, but is not limited to, not placing masonry materials above wood or other lighter materials.

A building may not have a street façade of one primary material, and three walls of another material, unless the façade material returns a substantial distance on the side elevations, terminating at a logical point, such as a vertical plane break.

Changes of materials shall relate to historic patterns of material use, the articulation of the building with plane breaks and/or reflect interior and exterior patterns of use or ownership.

The materials used on side and rear façades shall be comparable to, rather than contrasting with, the primary façade material in scale, color and finish and, depending on visibility from the street, also with dominant visible wall materials in the district. The inherent colors of visible non-façade materials shall be of similar hue and value to those of the façade and shall introduce no more than two additional colors.

Primary street façade materials shall not be reflective or shiny or have some other attention-garnering quality.

The primary street façade material shall be uniform in color and restrained in variety and articulation in order to be comparable to the pattern of materials usage established by historic buildings.

Materials of the façade with permanent, inherent coloring shall not introduce visual incompatibility through the use of colors and finishes not found in traditional building materials. More color may be introduced through secondary materials and small scale features.

Materials for visible roofs of the main block of a building shall be asphalt shingles of a dark or neutral gray or tan color. Other roofing materials may be used for porches and similar appendages.

A street façade shall have a top edge of a building defined by a cornice, parapet or comparable terminating element or have eaves that project beyond the planes of the exterior walls.

Any wood in a visible location shall have an opaque finish.

Windows and Doors

Window and door openings shall relate to interior and exterior patterns of use or ownership.

The street façade shall have window openings that meet the mandate to have a comparable ratio of solids and voids.

The dominant fenestration pattern shall use rectangular sash that is taller than it is wide; a limited number of windows may have other shapes and orientations.

More than one window sash may be placed in a wall opening, as is found in a bank of windows.

The main entrance shall be placed in the street façade or on a side façade near the front of the property.

There are no material requirements for windows and doors.

Solar Panels

The use of visible solar panels in new construction may integrate the panels into the overall design, i.e. as shade devices or awnings or be integral to the roof, except on or as extensions of a street-facing roof slope.

Solar panels may be installed if they meet the requirements for visual compatibility in the Solar Panel Installation Policy adopted by the Preservation Board.